

Meanwhile, the push to find new markets and sources of raw materials had taken the industrialized nations into parts of the world where disease and unsanitary conditions prevented a full utilization of human and natural resources. Some means had to be found to train "foot soldiers" for the public health movement at home and abroad. The Rockefeller Foundation saw the South as another such underdeveloped region, and as it expanded its public health work overseas, it drew on its experience in the region. In 1913, for example, the foundation's International Health Board used the Sanitary Commission's work in North Carolina as a model for its hookworm campaign in the British West Indies. When the board decided to establish a training site that would serve as a model for local health departments, it also looked to North Carolina for a location, and to a North Carolinian for a director. Dr. Benjamin E. Washburn set up shop in Wilson County in 1916. State Health Officer Rankin was so impressed with the success of the training site that he asked Washburn to direct a new Bureau of County Health Work in the State Board of Health. The Rockefeller Foundation continued to pay Washburn's salary, and he moved quickly to set up county health departments modeled on the Wilson experiment.¹⁸

University of North Carolina officials, aware of the advances in public health work in the state, were eager to get involved. Health issues became the focus of much discussion on campus in the spring of 1919. The influenza epidemic of the previous winter and the surprisingly poor physical condition of recent army recruits prompted concern among politicians and educators. In response, the legislature allocated money for a campus health officer. Dr. William deB. MacNider of the University of North Carolina School of Medicine saw this as an opportunity to hire someone who, in addition to serving the university, might also cooperate with the Board of Health in providing training for public health workers. He put the idea to State Health Officer Rankin, who responded coolly, believing that the "scientific and theoretical training" given at the university would be impractical for public officials. MacNider eventually won the ear of Rankin's assistant, Benjamin Washburn, who convinced the board to submit to the university a tentative proposal for a training school. The board saw two related benefits from such a plan. First, university students who were exposed to "the rules of hygiene and sanitation" would become proponents of public health once back in their own communities. Second, the university could help train desperately needed health officers and public health nurses.¹⁹